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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 000513

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DEPT FOR AF/C AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2017

TAGS: PHUM PINR PREL BY

SUBJECT: BURUNDI'S PRESIDENT ANNOUNCES CABINET CHANGES

REF: A. BUJUMBURA 422

1B. BUJUMBURA 453  
1C. BUJUMBURA 376

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia Moller for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary. President Nkurunziza announced new appointments in seven ministries, and announced the creation of a new Ministry, the Ministry of Regional Integration and Cooperation. They mark the third round of new appointments in the Nkurunziza government since early June 2007. Two of Burundi's largest political parties chose not to participate in the new government, notably the Burundian Front for Democracy (FRODEBU) and the Union for National Progress (UPRONA). In his appointments the President included two former members of the government, former President of the National Assembly Immaculee Nahayo, and former Minister of Communication, Ramadhan Karenga, who was tapped to head the new ministry. Nahayo and Karenga are strong supporters of ousted CNDD-FDD chairman Hussein Radjabu, and their return to the government could serve as political cover for the President should Radjabu's possible conviction for "intent to disrupt national security through an armed rebellion" create a backlash among his other supporters. End Summary.

12. (U) Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza announced new ministerial appointments July 13 in seven of the twenty-three Ministries within his cabinet. He also announced the creation of a new ministry, the Ministry of Regional Integration and Cooperation. This announcement marks the third round of changes in President Nkurunziza's administration since early June 2007, following changes first in his senior staff (Reftel A) and then in the Presidency of the Constitutional Court and six of Burundi's seventeen governorships (Reftel B).

13. (U) Burundi's second and third largest political parties, the Burundian Front for Democracy (FRODEBU), and the Union for National Progress (UPRONA) announced that they would not participate in the new government, with UPRONA even going so far as threatening July 14 to dismiss the First Vice-President (from UPRONA) for co-signing the President's decree announcing the new government. Dr Yves Sahinguvu, of UPRONA, stated that he was not consulted before being nominated, and would not serve in the government. He further said that to accept the appointment from the President under these circumstances would be a violation of the UPRONA party's internal rules, which he refused to do.

14. (U) The Government of Burundi offered no official reason for the ministerial changes. In a meeting with leaders of the three major parties on July 10, reported in the media to

have lasted no longer than five minutes, Nkurunziza took nominations for potential candidates put forth for the widely anticipated cabinet changes. According to reports in the media, the Burundian Front for Democracy (FRODEBU) did not put forward candidates for the cabinet. Parties that collected more than 5% of the votes in the last general election are entitled to representation in the government, but are not required to participate. Positions in the cabinet, as directed by the Constitution, are allocated according to party affiliation, but the president of the republic is allowed to appoint Ministerial positions as he or she wishes.

15. (U) The new appointments are as follows:

-- Ministry of Finance: Madame Clotilde Nizigama, formerly the Administrative Director of the Burundian Agency of Execution of Works in the Public Interest (ABUTIP). Nizigama is a member of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy - Forces for the defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD). She replaces Madame Denise Sinankwa (CNDD-FDD).

-- Ministry of Commerce and Industry: Madame Estella Nicayenzi, formerly worked for Socit Burundais de Financement (SBF), one of Burundi's leading banks. Nicayenzi is a member of CNDD-FDD. She replaces Jean Bigirimana (CNDD-FDD).

-- Ministry of Public Works and Equipment: Joseph Hasabamagara, formerly held the position of Deputy member of the CNDD-FDD. Hasabamagara replaces Potame Nizigire (CNDD-FDD).

-- Ministry of Transportation, Post, and Telecommunications: Philippe Njoni, formerly the Principal Councilor in the office of the First Vice-President. Njoni is a member of the Union for National Progress (UPRONA). He replaces Marie Goreth Nizigame (UPRONA).

-- Ministry of Public Health: Dr. Yves Sahinguvu was appointed, but withdrew his name from consideration. He is a member of UPRONA, and would have replaced Dr. Triphonie Nkurunziza (PARENA).

-- A new Minister of Public Health was appointed July 16, but Embassy is unable at this time to confirm the correct spelling of her name.

-- Ministry of Civil Service, Labor, and Social Security: Daniel Kinigi, formerly manager in charge of public enterprises in the Ministry of Public Function, Labor, and Social Security. Kingi is a member of the Movement for the Citizen's Reconciliation (MRC). He replaces Juvenal Ngogwanabusa (MRC).

-- Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights, and Gender: Immaculee Nahayo, formerly the President of the National Assembly. Nahayo is a member of the CNDD-FDD. She replaces Francoise Ngendahayo (MSP-Inkinzo).

-- Ministry of Regional Integration and Cooperation: Ramadhan Karenga, formerly the Minister of Information, Communications, Relations with the Parliament, and Spokesman for the Government. Karenga is a member of the CNDD-FDD. This is a newly created cabinet ministry.

16. (C) Comment. It is not yet clear why the President made these changes in his cabinet at this time, as there is little change along party lines. It is worth noting, however, the return of two former highly-placed members of the government, the former President of the National Assembly, Immaculee Nahayo, and former Minister of Communications, Ramadhan Karenga. Each of them are well known as loyal supporters of ousted CNDD-FDD party president Hussein Radjabu, currently in prison awaiting trial for "intent to disrupt national security through an armed rebellion." (Reftel C) Nahayo and Karenga, both members of the CNDD-FDD, were reported to have received "strong and sustained applause" when their names

were announced at the July 16 swearing-in ceremony for the new members of the government. If, through these two appointments, President Nkurunziza can share in some of that "glow", he benefits politically. In addition, the President's appointment of these two popular supporters of Radjabu could serve as political cover should Radjabu's possible conviction create a backlash among his other supporters.

7.(C) Indeed, many here believe that Karenga is, perhaps, Radjabu's staunchest supporter in the government. One long-time Burundian observer of the political scene here noted that, since Radjabu's arrest, funds from Muslim donors outside Burundi have shrunk considerably. He suggests that Karenga's return to a prominent position within the government could be a signal of goodwill to those supporters, and may serve to refresh a dried-up source of much-needed donations. The new ministry that he will head, Regional Integration and Cooperation, is a timely addition to the government, considering Burundi's recent entry into the East African Community, an organization important to Burundi's future, and comprises countries with large Muslim communities. Karenga's standing within that community, and his closeness to the former CNDD-FDD chairman, could partially explain his return to the government. End Comment.

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